UNDERSTANDING AND MANAGING DIVERSITY

THE PERSONNEL CHALLENGE FOR LEADERS

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Abstract

This paper addresses the subject of diversity. The changing demographics in America projects by the year 2000, almost two-thirds of new entrants into the workforce will be women, and 29 percent will be non-white. The key to successful leadership will be an understanding and awareness of diversity in the organization. The purpose of this research is to provide a consolidated source of educational references on diversity. Although this project is narrow in scope and breadth it serves as a point of departure for those attempting to improve their understanding and awareness of the leadership challenges of diversity.

Diversity was initially defined as: the different or dissimilar attitudes, values, and way of life between people based on race, religion, color, national origin, economic status, and gender. This definition paved the evolution of diversity around five approaches: (1) the golden rule, (2) assimilation, (3) righting the wrong, (4) culture specific approach, and (5) the multicultural.

The prevailing idea on diversity broadens the scope and defines diversity as any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities. The key here is the inclusion of similarities and synergy created between differences and similarities to achieve an effective workforce reflective of the America society. To assist leaders and mangers in the "diversity challenge," several tools are available. Two such tools are the diversity management process and the diversity paradigm options for action.

In conclusion, diversity has made significant improvements in the lives of the American workforce. Although more work lies ahead, diversity's impact on the workforce will continue to evolve with the changing values of our society.

Chapter 1

Introduction

People and their differences make up the foundation of an organization's ability to develop broad perspectives and to approach business problems in new and creative ways.

—Barbara Walker (1991)

Today's organizational environment is characterized by a variety of variables people bring to the organization such as: race, gender, religion, age, socioeconomic backgrounds, and national or regional origin. All of these variables comprise the workforce of the 1990s. The term used to define these variables of today's workforce is called "Diversity." Diversity within America has long been acknowledged as one of this country's greatest strengths. Diversity is not a new term but it's impact on society and the organizational workforce is and will continue to shape the workforce of 21st century.

The Department of Defense (DOD) reflects the diversity of America. As such, failure within DOD to appreciate individual differences through awareness of and sensitivity to diversity can impede DOD's ability to discharge the mission of the defense of the United States.

Training and sensitivity on diversity should not focus on changing valid expectations and standards for people, but should simply recognize the fact that people are different and will react differently in different situation, and should attempt to reduce the friction

that may result. As employees (officers, enlisted, civilians) of DOD and leaders within the DOD structure either informally or formally diversity in the workplace it will become one of the most important challenges in personnel management. Among the keys to successful leadership of people will be the awareness, understanding, and acceptance of differences among people, in other word's diversity.

My research provides information on understanding diversity. A consolidation of various educational references on diversity, and although limited in scope and breadth serves as point of departure for those attempting to improve themselves, their environment and ultimately their organization in understanding diversity. The understanding of diversity is just one of several challenges of today's workforce. The fact remains, the contemporary workforce does not look like, act, or has the same desires as the workforce of the past. As such, the challenge is stated below:

The Challenge

Without question, diversity work is the hardest and most challenging you will encounter. Valuing and managing diversity touches people's emotions, values, and beliefs. It asks people to question and makes changes in their behavior. It asks organizations to change policies, systems, and practices—many of which no one questioned for years-and many of which have contributed not only to the organization's traditions and values, but also to its success.

The resistance to change in diversity interventions is significant. Employees who have been oppressed for years are no longer patient. Some people who have been in power for years are afraid to share that power. All of these issues make this work different from most training and organizational development work. The interventions are not the same as general supervisory skills, total quality management training, production controls, or performance management. Diversity impacts everything the organization and the people in the organization do. Managing diversity is not easy. This work is not for those looking for the "quick fix."[1]

Notes

[1]United States Office of Personnel Management, *Managing Diversity*, Participant Workbook (52JP) B285, 1.

Chapter 2

Diversity: "In the Beginning"

There's no question that it's easier to manage people who are the same,
but we are not-and it is not our similarities that causes our problems

—Jim Braham (1989)

What is diversity? Diversity can be defined as: The different or dissimilar attitudes, values, and way of life between people based on race, religion, color, national origin, economic status, gender, etc.[1]

Diversity is a sensitive topic and is discussed under such labels as civil rights, affirmative action, reverse discrimination, quotas, racism, and sexism.   Consider the statement made by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall upon his retirement to the press that, as a black in America in 1991, "I'm not free." He likened his experience as one of the highest ranking black men in this country to that of a well-traveled Pullman porter he had known who "had never been in any city in the United States where he had to put his hand up in front of his face to find out he was Negro."[2]

Justice Marshall's comment addresses one view of diversity, but the shame lies in the fact that, at times, the issue of diversity becomes so heated that, the approach is to say and do nothing about it! In essence, whatever you say or do can be used against you. Thus, avoiding controversy is a basic business principle in many organizations, particularly when it involves the complexity and emotionalism of diversity. Yes, it is difficult to solve

problems concerning differential treatment of women and people of color when such problems cannot even be discussed. This reluctance to speak out or stand out on diversity matters has kept many organizations from making progress on diversity.

Diversity became an issue as the result of three powerfully significant trends reaching their own critical points at about the same time: First, the global market in which American corporations do business became intensely competitive.[3] Second, the makeup of the US workforce began changing dramatically, becoming more diverse.[4] Third, individuals began to increasingly celebrate their differences and become less amenable to compromising what makes them unique.[5] This third event represented a marked departure from previous times when predisposition's were to "fit in."[6]

In understanding diversity, traditionally, the American approach has been assimilation. Newcomers are expected to adapt so that they "fit" the burden of making the change falls on them.[7] Nowhere was this more evident in society then in the business world. Managers insisted people who are different bear the brunt of adjusting, and they have been more willing to help employees through the process.[8] For example, it was common for managers to tell new employees:

> We have determined in this company that there is a specific culture, and that people who fit a given mold do better than those who do not. As you join us, we're going to hold up a mirror in front of you. In this mirror, you will note that we have sketched the outline of the mold that works here. If you fit, fine, come on in. If you don't we invite you to allow us to shape you to the appropriate mold. This is for our mutual benefit, as it will help to ensure that you have a productive relationship with the company.[9]

The example above illustrates the assimilation model which in the past was so acceptable many managers tended to take it for granted. Managers believed that their organizational culture evolved over the years in response to business realities, and it seems

only reasonable that employees be expected to conform. Assimilation is what ensures unity and common purpose; without it, there would be chaos.[10] In addition to the managerial push of assimilation, employees too, "bought into" the rationale of assimilation in anticipation of promised success as a result of conforming, they have dropped their ethnic and gender identity off at the front door of the corporation.[11]

How Approaches to Diversity Have Evolved

The meaning of diversity fluctuates partly because the concept is still evolving, and under rather difficult conditions. More people are vying for jobs today than when affirmative action was first introduced. The consequence of making existing jobs available to more people (who may not have been allowed to compete for those jobs without affirmative action) is that jobs are being lost by white men.[12] In previous years, when jobs seemed more plentiful, this loss was not so keenly felt. However, in today's job market where affirmative action is being challenged, some advocates of diversity have abandoned many aspects of affirmative action to distinguish diversity as a separate concept. Instead, business performance is emphasized as a reason for diversity rather than the moral imperative that permeated the affirmative action movement.[13] Advocates of diversity also emphasize skills and abilities to avoid the problem that affirmative action came to mean hiring or promoting members of covered groups who are less qualified than their white male cohorts.[14] By making diversity seem as different from affirmative action as possible to avoid the problems and mistakes that occurred in the past, this strategy creates its own set of problems.

The evolution of diversity can be illustrated by describing five various approaches that have been taken over the years, each of which incorporates different assumptions. The five approaches are the golden rule, assimilation, righting the wrongs, the culture-specific approach, and the multicultural approach.

In the golden rule approach to diversity, the idea is to treat each individual with civility, prescribed in the Bible as "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."[15] According to this approach, the only important differences are individual differences. And since everyone is special and different, everyone should be appreciated and treated the same.[16] Prejudice and systemic oppression are not recognized; individual responsibility and morality make diversity work. While this approach has a great deal of merit, its major flaw is that the golden rule is applied from one's own frame of reference, without regard for the traditions and preferences of the other person.[17] Moreover, the assumption that sex or racial differences are no more important than individual differences such as baldness or extroversion is insulting to those who have encountered discrimination all of their lives. Because of this assumption, the pretension of "color blindness" and ignoring sex differences in this and the next approach weaken both as viable approaches to diversity.

Assimilation calls for shaping people to the style already dominant in an organization. This approach has created considerable conflict for individuals who feel they must abandon their preferred style, companions, dress, or values while they are working.[18] Assimilation is now generally regarded as a dysfunctional business strategy in this country because the resulting homogeneity may stifle the creativity and breadth of view that is essential to compete in today's market.[19]

"Right the wrongs" is an attempt to address the historical injustices that have systematically put at a disadvantage members of specific groups, such as Native Americans, Hispanics, and women in general. These groups are targeted, often one by one, as they reach a critical mass in an organization, to be hired, promoted, and rewarded more equitably.[20] This approach to diversity is closest to the affirmative action concept, but more attention is given to understanding and taking advantage of the unique characteristics of each group to improve the organization's performance.[21] Because group differences and histories are accentuated, a "we versus they" tension often increases the backlash and infighting that interfere with progress.[22]

The culture-specific approach is frequently used to help prepare employees for an international assignment. Employees are taught the norms and practices of another culture so that they can adjust their behavior for that environment; however, little attempt is made to generate an appreciation for the values of that culture.[23] The goal may be to help employees fit in on a superficial level, without any substantive change being involved.[24]

The Multicultural approach involves increasing the consciousness and appreciation of differences associated with the heritage, characteristics, and values of many different groups. In this approach, diversity has a broad meaning that encompasses sex and ethnic groups along with groups based on such attributes as nationality, professional discipline, or cognitive style. In contrast to the assimilation model, this approach assumes that the organization must change and that the norms must accommodate a wide range of workers.[25] The explicit goal is to strengthen the organization by leveraging a host of significant differences. Polarization is a lesser problem because so many groups and type

of differences are recognized and because self-knowledge and interpersonal skills are often emphasized along with education about other groups.[26]

Managing Diversity the Next Phase

The evolution of diversity must include integration and awareness. People with diverse backgrounds and physical characteristics must be integrated into the teams that plan and carry out an organization's activities so that their ideas and skills are used and not merely acknowledged. This way of thinking led to the concept of managing diversity.

Managing diversity is a form of human resource management. It addresses the many ways employees are different and the many ways they are alike. Managing diversity goes beyond race and gender, and includes many other dimensions. It is not about white males managing women and minorities; it is about all managers empowering whoever is in their workforce.[27]

Managing diversity means approaching diversity at three levels simultaneously: individual, interpersonal, and organizational.[28] The traditional focus has been on individual and interpersonal aspects alone. What is new is seeing diversity as an issue for the entire organization, involving the very way organizations are structured.

Managing diversity is dealing with the way organizations are managed, and the way managers do their jobs. It is grounded in a very specific definition of managing: creating an environment that allows the people being managed to reach their full potential.[29] At its best, it means getting from employees not only everything you have a right to expect, but everything they have to offer.

Managing diversity assumes that adaptation is a two-way street, a mutual process between the individual and the organization versus the usual assimilation approach, where the burden of adapting rests solely on the individual who is different.[30]

Finally, unlike more familiar approaches, managing diversity is not a program, not an orchestrated set of actions designed to "do" something. It calls for more than changing individual behaviors. It requires a fundamental change in the corporation's way of life and implementing it takes years.[31]

Notes

[1]Air University Pamphlet, *Diversity Awareness and Equal Opportunity and Treatment*, November 1994, 2.

[2]Ann M. Morrison, *The New Leaders: Guidelines on Leadership Diversity in America,* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers), 1.

[3]R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Work Force by Managing Diversity,* (New York, NY: American Management Association), 3.

[4]Ibid., 3.

[5]Ibid., 4.

[6]Ibid., 4.

[7]Ibid., 7.

[8]Ibid., 7.

[9]Ibid., 7.

[10]Ibid., 7.

[11]Ibid., 7.

[12]Ann M. Morrison, *The New Leaders: Guidelines on Leadership Diversity in America,* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers), 5.

[13]Ibid., 5.

[14]Ibid., 5.

[15]Ibid., 5.

[16]Ibid., 6.

[17]Ibid., 6.

[18]Ibid., 6.

[19]Ibid., 6.

[20]Ibid., 6.

[21]Ibid., 6.

[22]Ibid., 6.

[23]Ibid., 6.

[24]Ibid., 6.

Notes

[25]Ibid., 7.
[26]Ibid., 7.
[27]R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., *Beyond Race and Gender: Unleashing the Power of Your Total Work Force by Managing Diversity,* (New York, NY: American Management Association), 12.
[28]Ibid., 12.
[29]Ibid., 12.
[30]Ibid., 12.
[31]Ibid., 12.

Chapter 3

Diversity Paradigms

Managing diversity is a process by which the organization, not the employees, makes the effort to embrace differences, however, there are no standardized strategies for managing cultural diversity. An individual can appreciate differences, be free of bias, and still not know how to manage a diverse work team. It boils down to a leadership issue. To use diversity to an organization's advantage, you must take control and make the differences work for you

—Air University, Diversity Awareness Pamphlet
November 1994

To further our understanding of diversity we will examine three diversity paradigms influencing today's workforce: (1) The Discrimination-and-Fairness, (2) Access-and-Legitimacy paradigms have channeled organizational thinking in powerful ways. By limiting the ability of employees to acknowledge openly their work-related but culturally based differences, these paradigms actually undermine the organization's capacity to learn and improve its strategies, processes, and practices. These two paradigms keep people from identifying strongly and personally with their work a critical source of motivation and self-regulation in any organizational environment. Finally, the Learning-and-Effectiveness paradigm for managing diversity incorporates the concepts of the first two paradigms, thereby tapping diversity's true benefits.

The Discrimination and Fairness Paradigm

The discrimination-and-fairness paradigm is perhaps, thus far, the dominant way of understanding diversity. Leaders who look at diversity through this lens usually focus on equal opportunity, fair treatment, recruitment, and compliance with federal equal employment opportunity requirements. The paradigm's underlying logic can be expressed as follow:

> Prejudice has kept members of certain demographic groups out of organizations such as ours. As a matter of fairness and to comply with federal mandates, we need to work toward restructuring the makeup of our organization to let it more closely reflect that of society. We need managerial processes that ensure that all our employees are treated equally and with respect and that some are not given unfair advantage over others.[1]

Although it resembles the thinking behind traditional affirmative-action efforts, the discrimination and fairness paradigm goes beyond a simple concern with numbers. Organizations operating under this philosophical orientation often institute mentoring and career-development programs specifically for the women and people of color in their ranks and train other employees to respect cultural differences.[2] Under this paradigm, nevertheless, progress in diversity is measured by how well the organization achieves its recruitment and retention goals instead of the degree to which conditions in the organization allow it's members to draw on their personal assets and perspectives to do their work more effectively. In short, the staff gets diversified but the work does not.[3]

The benefits of this paradigm are it tends to increase demographic diversity in an organization, and it often succeeds in promoting fair treatment. The limitations are color-blind, gender-blind ideals to some degree built on the implicit assumptions that "we are all the same" or "we aspire to being all the same."[4] Under this paradigm, it is not desirable

for diversification of the workforce to influence the organization's work or culture. The organization should operate as if every person were of the same race, gender, and nationality. Leaders who manage diversity under this paradigm will explore how people's differences generate a potential diversity of effective ways of working, leading, viewing the environment, managing people and learning.[5]

The discrimination-and-fairness paradigm insist that everyone is the same; but, with emphasis on equal treatment, it puts pressure on employees to make sure that important differences among them do not count.[6] Genuine disagreements about work definition, therefore, are sometimes wrongly interpreted through this paradigm's fairness-unfairness lens-especially when honest disagreements are accompanied by tense debate.[7]

The Access and Legitimacy Paradigm

The "dog-eat-dog" atmosphere of the 1980s and 1990s, gave birth to a new rhetoric and rationale for managing diversity emerged. If the discrimination and fairness paradigm can be said to have idealized assimilation and color-blind, gender-blind conformist, the access and legitimacy paradigm was predicated on the acceptance and celebration of differences.[8] The underlying motivation of the access and legitimacy paradigm can be expressed this way. We are living in an increasingly multicultural country, and new ethnic groups are quickly gaining consumer power. Our organizations need a demographically more diverse workforce to help us gain access to these differentiated segments. We need employees with multilingual skills in order to understand and serve our customers better and to gain legitimacy with them. Diversity is not just fair, it makes business sense.[9]

Where this paradigm has taken hold, where organizations have pushed for, access to and legitimacy with, a more diverse clientele by matching the demographics of the organization to those of critical consumer or constituent groups. The common characteristic of organizations that have successfully used the access and legitimacy paradigm to increase their demographic diversity are organizations operating in environments in which there is increased diversity among customers, clients, or the labor pool and therefore a clear opportunity or an imminent threat to the company.

The strength of this paradigm lies in its market (environment) based motivation and the potential for competitive advantage that it suggests are often qualities an entire company can understand and therefore support.[10] But the paradigm is perhaps more notable for its limitation. Access and legitimacy organizations tend to emphasize the role of cultural differences in organizations without really analyzing those differences to determine how they actually affect the work that is performed.

Where discrimination and fairness leaders are too quick to subvert differences in the interest of preserving harmony, access-and-legitimacy leaders are too quick to push staff with niche capabilities into differentiated pigeonholes without trying to understand what those capabilities really are and how they could be integrated into the company's mainstream work.[11]

The access-and-legitimacy paradigm's main limitation is, that under this influence, the motivation for diversity usually emerges from very immediate and often crisis-oriented needs for access and legitimacy.[12] This paradigm can leave some employees feeling exploited. Many organizations using this paradigm have diversified only in those areas in which they interact with particular niche-market segments.[13] In time, many individuals

recruited for this function have come to feel devalued and used as they begin to sense that opportunities in other parts of the organization are closed to them.

Learning and Effectiveness Paradigm

The learning-and-effectiveness paradigm is a way organizations develop an outlook on diversity that enables them to incorporate employees' perspectives into the main work of the organization and enhance work by rethinking primary tasks and redefining strategies, missions, practices, and even cultures.[14] This paradigm recognizes that employees frequently make decisions and choices at work that draw upon their cultural background.

The overarching theme of learning and effective paradigm is integration, where assimilation (discrimination and fairness paradigm) goes too far in pursuing sameness and differentiation (access and legitimacy paradigm) overshoots in the other direction.[15] It promotes equal opportunity for all individuals, acknowledges cultural differences among people, and recognizes the value in those differences among people.[16] This is accomplished by letting the organization internalize differences among employees so that it learns and grows because of them. Once in place, the organization can say, we are all on the same team, with our differences not despite them.[17]

Making the Paradigm Shift

Finally, in making the paradigm shift there are eight preconditions that facilitate organizations to make the transition to the learning-and-effective method of managing diversity they are as follows:

1. *Leadership must understand that a diverse workforce will embody different perspectives and approaches to work, and must truly value variety of opinion and insight.* This means management making the link between different identity groups and different approaches to how work gets done and has come to see that there is more than one right way to get positive results.

2. *Leadership must recognize both the learning opportunities and the challenges that the expression of different perspectives presents for an organization.* This precondition is based on leadership that is committed to persevering during the long process of learning and relearning.

3. *The organizational culture must create an expectation of high standards of performance from everyone.* Such a culture isn't one that expects less from some employees than from others. Some organizations expect women and people of color to under perform a negative assumption that too often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

4. *The organizational culture must stimulate personal development.* Such a culture brings out people people's full range of useful knowledge and skills usually through the careful design of jobs that allows people to grow and develop, but also through training and education programs.

5. *The organizational culture must encourage openness.* Such a culture instills a high tolerance for debate and supports constructive conflict on work-related matters.

6. *The culture must make workers feel valued.* If this precondition is met, workers feel committed to-and empowered within-the organization and therefore feel comfortable taking the initiative to apply their skills and experiences in new ways to enhance their job performance.

7. *The organization must have a well-articulated and widely understood mission.*

8. *The organization must have a relatively egalitarian, non-bureaucratic structure.* Having a structure that promotes the exchange of ideas and welcomes constructive challenges to the usual way of doing things-from any employee with valuable experience. In other words, separate the enabling elements of bureaucracy (the ability to get things done) from the disabling elements of bureaucracy (those that create resistance to experimentation).[18]

Notes

[1]David A. Thomas and Robin J. Ely, "Making Differences Matter: A New Paradigm for Managing Diversity," *Harvard Business Review*, September-October 1996, 81.

[2]Ibid., 81.

[3]Ibid., 81.

[4]Ibid., 81.

[5]Ibid., 81.

[6]Ibid., 81.

[7]Ibid., 81.

[8]Ibid., 81.

[9]Ibid., 83.

[10]Ibid., 83.

Notes

[11]Ibid., 83.
[12]Ibid., 84.
[13]Ibid., 84.
[14]Ibid., 85.
[15]Ibid., 86.
[16]Ibid., 86.
[17]Ibid., 86.
[18]Ibid., 86.

Chapter 4

Redefining Diversity

It's obvious to us that managing diversity is not just a work issue; it is a business issue. Affirmative action is a work force issue; managing diversity is a competitive issue. It's a competitive and a business issue because it touches both customers and employees.

—Wayne E. Hedien (1994)

The word diversity for the general public has become verbal shorthand for a workforce that is multiracial, multicultural, and multiethnic that means it comes pre-loaded with people's own individual perceptions and biases.[1] In business, diversity has become a kind of semantic umbrella that encompasses an assortment of programs that emanate from their department: affirmative action, multiculturalism, understanding differences, and a host of other well-intentioned undertakings.[2] Senior management and managers of other functions tend to use the word more generally, and often more vaguely, but they too are essentially referring to the demographic characteristics of their workforce.[3]

As such, it is time to redefine diversity with a broader vision. This broader application of diversity refers to any mixture of items characterized by differences and similarities.[4]

> In other words, diversity is not synonymous with differences, but encompasses differences and similarities. It means when making managerial decisions, you no longer have the option of dealing only with the differences or similarities present in the situation; instead, you must deal with both simultaneously. You may face many situations where choosing

to consider only the differences or only the similarities is a legitimate option, but this is not the same as dealing with diversity.

One way of conceptualizing this is to think in terms of a macro/micro continuum. A micro perspective looks at the individual component and a macro perspective looks at the mixture. To get at the true nature of diversity (comprising differences and similarities) requires an ability to assume both perspectives simultaneously; the micro facilitates identification of differences, and the macro enhances the ability to see similarities.

A basketball player who is concerned about her needs rather than the team's needs is taking the micro-perspective. On the other hand, a player who thinks primarily of the team's needs while not recognizing individual strengths has the macro-perspective. The diversity perspective is the player who simultaneously considers both the micro needs of the individual players (including herself) and the macro needs of the team.[5]

Diversity refers to the collective (all-inclusive) mixture of differences and similarities along a given dimension. When dealing with diversity, you are focusing on the collective mixture, not just pieces of it.[6]

To highlight this notion of mixture, visualize a jar of red jelly beans; now imagine adding some green and purple jelly beans. Many would believe that the green and purple jelly beans represents diversity. Diversity instead is represented by the resultant mixture of red, green, and purple jelly beans. When faced with a collection of diverse jelly beans, most managers worry about how to handle the last jelly beans added to the mixture. This is not dealing with diversity. The manager who is truly coping with racial diversity is not dealing with blacks, whites, Hispanics, or Asian Americans but rather with the collective mixture.[7]

The true meaning of diversity suggest that if you are concerned about racism, you include all races; if you are concerned about gender, you include both genders; or if you are concerned about age issues, you include all age groups. In other words, the mixture is all-inclusive.

Finally, the elements in diversity mixtures can vary, and so a discussion of diversity must specify the dimensions in question. The components of a diversity mixture can be people, concepts, concrete items, or abstractions.[8] For example, if you are reflecting on

the many ways your employees can vary (by race, gender, age, education, sexual orientation, geographic origin, or tenure, age, education, sexual orientation, geographic origin, or tenure with the organization), that is a mixture whose components are people, and individuals categorized along multiple dimensions.[9]

The Link between Diversity and Complexity

In redefining diversity, we must recognize that diversity contributes to complexity and complexity reflects diversity and the two mirror each other. Complexity is a function of the number of components involved and the degree of variability about how many different elements you have to work with, and how different they are from one another.[10] The same can be said of diversity: The more lines of business you have, the more functions, the more races represented in your workforce, and the greater the differences among them, and the greater the diversity.[11] The bottom line is as you develop skills at understanding and dealing with diversity you also, hone your skills in understanding and dealing with complexity.

Diversity, Complexity and Strategic Management

Diversity and complexity will permeate the strategic management process of your organization. Outlined below are seven areas if mismanaged can bring the strongest organization to near ruin:

1. Workforce diversity. Today, managers are facing the most diverse workforce ever. Women, minorities, and immigrants are growing in number and playing increasingly important roles; yet managers struggle continually to find vehicles to ensure full use of these employees' potential.
2. Teaming. Many corporations are turning to teaming as a strategic structure. Transforming a group of people from different functions and other significant variations into a cohesive, focused unit can be an imposing challenge.

3. Globalism. As opportunities abroad present themselves, managers must deal with more and more complexity across a wide variety of national situations. This complexity stretches traditional perspectives and structures.
4. Acquisitions and merges. American corporations appear to alternate between periods of inclination and disinclination toward acquisitions and mergers, between celebrating the advantages of having variety and emphasizing those associated with sticking to the basic business. Corporations move back and forth between strategies of acquisitions and divestitures, so much so that some managers are now gun-shy and confused.
5. Work/family. In all kinds of organizations, managers are being asked to accommodate a wider variety of employees' expectations about balance between work and family. In spite of much attention and some progress, the growing consensus is that movement has been too slow.
6. Cross-functional coordination. Achieving effective collaboration between functions while pushing for excellence in all functions is one of the most difficult of all managerial challenges.
7. Managing change. Managers who take on the role of change agents find themselves challenging environments that are complex and dynamic and that demand equally dynamic and complex adaptation. But frequently, they encounter resistance from colleagues who have difficulty accepting and understanding this complexity. For example, change agents, by definition, present cutting-edge ideas that have not been quantified.   Often their ideas are met with unanswerable questions like these: Do you have numbers to support your propositions? Can you prove what you are recommending will work? Result: stalemate.12

In deconstructing these seven areas here is how diversity and complexity are

represented:

> In "workforce diversity," you have a mixture of people who can vary along an infinite number of lines age, tenure, lifestyle, sexual orientation, education, experience, geographic origin, race, gender-just to name a few possibilities.

> If you are organizing around "teams," you have similar concerns: a collection of people who can vary along many dimensions and who probably come from very different operating units in the company.

> If "globalism" is your immediate concern, you have to deal with a mixture of nations that have differences and similarities in terms of people, history, culture, religion, politics, technology, priorities, and location.

> If you are interested in "acquisitions and mergers," you have a mixture of entities that may be different and similar in nature of business, strategy, success factors, vision, mission, technology, culture, financial status, and people.

The range of "work/family issues" represented by the total workforce is growing every day. You have single parents, childless couples, traditional couples with children, and same-sex couples, traditional couples without children, and same-sex couples with children. Some employees are totally oriented toward work, some are committed primarily to family, and some are actively seeking a balance between work, family and personal life.

If you are wrestling with the particularly difficult issue of "cross-functional coordination," you have a mixture of functions that can have similarities and differences regarding tasks, goals, communication patterns, time orientation, people (with all their differences and similarities), and culture.

"Managing change" means dealing with a mixture of quantitative and non-quantitative data. If you cannot deal with both kinds of data, the change process will be compromised. Those who say "I can work only with quantifiable data" are unable to cope with the complexity of the data coming to the organization. In effect, they are saying, "I will make decisions based only on quantitative, simply because I cannot process other data." This attitude creates a serious handicap for organizations that operate in a complex environment that presents both quantitative and qualitative data which is the case for almost all organizations to some degree.[13]

The Diversity Management Process

The diversity management process is a four-step tool available to lead an informed, coordinated process that produces change in a more cohesive and efficient manner. The four steps are as follows:

Step 1: Get Clear on the Problem

The first step in solving a problem is to analyze what is happening. What changes are occurring in the environment your organization does business in and how important are they? What do you need to succeed in your organizational mission, and what is interfering with your achieving success? What exactly is the problem? The key is being able to see clearly, without pre-judgments or personal bias, what is happening while you are in the midst of it is an important skill for leaders.[14]

Step 2: Analyze the Diversity Mixture

The next step is to analyze the elements in the set of circumstances you are dealing with. The goal is to be able to define the situation in terms of a diversity mixture. What are the elements of the mixture at hand? For example, if your concern is a mixture of product lines, they may be similar (or different) in the mechanisms used to manufacture them, in distribution channels, in profitability ratios, in current or potential customer base, in development costs, in need for consumer advertising, in their position in the product maturity cycle, in government regulatory requirements, and so on. Forcing yourself to consider all parts of the mixture is a first step in being sure you have covered all the bases when you plan a solution.[15]

Step 3: Check for Diversity Tension

After Step 2, you must ask yourself two questions: Am I seeing tension here as a result of this diversity mixture? And if so, do I need to do anything about it? Diversity tension refers to the conflict, stress, and strain associated with the interactions of the elements in the mixture. Tension of some sort often accompanies a diversity mixture but not always. When it is present, diversity tension is usually easy to spot. It may take different forms, or show itself in varying degrees, but generally we know tension when we see it. The real question is, does it require attention?[16]

Not all tension is bad. "Good" tension produces new ideas, new products, and new processes. Good tension acts like fine grit sandpaper, refining and polishing rough ideas into a gleaming finished product. Tension is a problem only when it interferes with your ability to achieve organizational objectives. Counterproductive tension is usually obvious. Dysfunctions abound: Interpersonal relationships disintegrate into constant squabbling:

Petty rivalries between departments end up paralyzing work, functions, and workgroups that are normally collaborating which are in fact sabotaging each other. The bottom line here is that you need to hone your analytical skills. You need to learn to recognize tension and to be clear on its root causes, on whether it is getting in the way of success and whether, it is directly linked to the primary problem.[17]

Step 4: Review Action Options

To help leaders find that "something else," another tool that is available is the Diversity Paradigm. This tool presents eight action options, described below. Once the leader has figured out the essence of the problem (first three steps), the task is to review the eight options in light of a particular situation, and choose one (or more) that seems to offer the best hope of solving the problem.

The Diversity Paradigm: Eight Options for Action

The diversity paradigm tool describes eight action options and defines a system for selecting the appropriate option for a given set of circumstances. It provides a way of organizing data, and discovering and recognizing patterns. At a minimum, this tool should address two fundamental issues: (1) the diversity mixture at hand and the available action choices, and (2) the factors that determine what action is selected.[18]

Table 1. The Diversity Paradigm Action Options

Option	Description
1. Include/exclude	Include by expanding the number and variability of mixture components. Or exclude by minimizing the number and variability of mixture components.
2. Deny	Minimize mixture diversity by explaining it away.
3. Assimilate	Minimize mixture diversity by insisting that "minority" components conform to the norms of the dominant factor.
4. Suppress	Minimize diversity by removing it from your consciousness by assigning it to the subconscious.
5. Isolate	Address diversity by including and setting "different" mixture components off to the side.
6. Tolerate	Address diversity by fostering a room-for-all attitude, albeit with limited superficial interactions among the mixture components.
7. Build relationships	Address diversity by fostering quality relationships characterized by acceptance and understanding among the mixture components.
8. Foster mutual adaptation	Address diversity by fostering mutual adaptation in which all components change somewhat, for the sake of achieving common objectives.

Option 1: Include/Exclude

This is the option that most people are familiar with, and it is the one that undergirds most affirmative action efforts, where the goal is primarily to increase the number of target group members in the organization at all hierarchical levels. The flip side of include is exclude. Here, the goal is to minimize diversity by keeping diverse elements out or by expelling them once they have been included.[19]

Option 2: Deny

In this option, everyone denies differences exist. Historically, denial has played a major role in managerial thinking, particularly for mangers who limit their understanding

of diversity to workforce issues. They practice denial when they tell employees who are different that their differences will not in any way affect how the organization treats them, that merit and performance alone will determine how far they can go. People of different races, for instance, are told, with pride, that the organization is color blind.[20]

Option 3: Assimilate

The basic premise of this option is that all elements are different, that all elements are in the minority somehow, and will learn to become like the dominant element. Minority employees will learn to fit in; a new overseas operation will be structured just like, and will run like, the home office: New products will be manufactured using the same processes as older products. Assimilation has been the dominant approach to differences and diversity across all kinds of dimensions. The difficulty arises, when the tried and true formulas no longer produce the same results. When the organizational environment is becoming destabilized.[21]

Option 4: Suppress

In this option, entities with differences are encouraged to keep a lid on them, not to manifest them. Suppression (sometimes used in conjunction with assimilation) differs from denial in that differences are recognized and acknowledged, but greatly discouraged for the good of the enterprise. Many people who exercise suppression sincerely believe the organization is greater than any one individual or component and that since the organization has been operating well within the status quo, entities with differences should submerge them for sake of the enterprise.[22]

Option 5: Isolate

Isolation allows you to include people or other entities that are different from the dominant system without having to change corporate culture or systems; you simply set the "different" entity off to the side.[23]

Option 6: Tolerate

This option can be called "the live and let live option." Here, we have the inclusion of entities with differences, but they do not value these entities or accept their differences. They simply acknowledge their right to exist.

> The tolerate option is grounded in the assumption that for the sake of the broader good, diverse entities can coexist without understanding, endorsing, or engaging each other affectively. This is a critical distinction between isolation and toleration. Isolation artificially limits its target; toleration does not limit, but rather simply never emotionally connects. Where toleration is used, you see managers of a new business line who never have felt accepted, or a racially different family in the neighborhood who does not feel discriminated against but yet does not feel accepted and valued. The act of toleration essentially is a condescending behavior. In effect the tolerator is saying, "By my grace, I am moved to allow your inclusion and coexistence." This condescension highlights the power imbalance between the parties. The "different" entity is repeatedly reminded of its subordinate position, even as the tolerator is becoming more tolerant. Limited engagement further exacerbates the feeling of not being valued.[24]

The tension associated with toleration is one of the significant driving forces behind the workplace initiatives generally known as valuing differences.

Option 7: Build Relationships

In this option, deliberate efforts are made to foster relationships between the various entities. The governing assumption is that a good relationship can overcome differences. While this approach has the potential to foster acceptance and understanding of

differences, often it is used to minimize them.[25]   This happens when the governing

assumption is interpreted as follows: "If we just can talk and learn more about each other,

despite our differences, I think we will find many similarities that can be grounds for a

mutually beneficial relationship."[26] In essence focusing on similarities, the hope is to avoid

challenges associated with differences.

Option 8: Foster Mutual Adaptation

Under this alternative, the parties involved accept and understand differences and

diversity, recognizing full well that doing so may call for adaptation by all concerned. To

fully accommodate the entire diversity mixture and all its components and to facilitate

maximum contribution to organizational objectives, every entity, not just the ones that are

different will have to make some changes.[27] The "foster mutual adaptation" alternative

argues that remodeling the house may be necessary not for the benefit of those who are

different, but for the sake of the viability of the enterprise.[28] Mutual adaptation permits

the greatest accommodation of diversity, which means that it enhances ability to deal with

overwhelming complexity. When the status quo starts to develop tiny fracture lines

running in all directions, a mutual adaptation mindset may be your best weapon against

disaster.[29]

Notes

[1]R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., *Redefining Diversity,* (New York, NY: American
Management Association), *4.*
[2]Ibid., 3.
[3]Ibid., 5.
[4]Ibid., 5.
[5]Ibid., 6.
[6]Ibid., 6.
[7]Ibid., 7.

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[8]Ibid., 8.
[9]Ibid., 8.
[10]Ibid., 9.
[11]Ibid., 9.
[12]Ibid., 11.
[13]Ibid., 12.
[14]Ibid., 14.
[15]Ibid., 15.
[16]Ibid., 15.
[17]Ibid., 16.
[18]Ibid., 19.
[19]Ibid., 20.
[20]Ibid., 21.
[21]Ibid., 22.
[22]Ibid., 24.
[23]Ibid., 25.
[24]Ibid., 27.
[25]Ibid., 28.
[26]Ibid., 28.
[27]Ibid., 28.
[28]Ibid., 28.
[29]Ibid., 28.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

We may have come over on different ships, but we're all in the same boat now.

—Whitney Young, Jr. (1991)

Diversity has brought people of similar and different backgrounds together onto "the same boat," and this boat is the American workforce. In these changing times marked by changing values and terminology it will be important to keep abreast of the evolution of diversity for the overall good of our society.

The life cycle of diversity flows from the "golden rule and assimilation" to the "diversity management process." The integration of similarities and differences to achieve a workforce that is flexible, responsive, and more productive has come at the expense of strained relations along ethnic, racial and gender lines. Unfortunately, it is my belief that these strained relations will continue into the 21st century until people feel respected and equal to one another.

The key to success will be open and honest discussions about diversity. Current material by various authors provides the educational foundation and methodologies to employ to make the workplace and society a better place. Tools to understand and implement diversity such as the diversity management process will facilitate the process. Unless the powerful and elite at the top of the public and private sectors of organizations

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are willing to implement such practices beyond lip service any efforts by workers and

leaders will be in vain.

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